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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the production of Master's theses at Howard University, Department of Romance Languages, over 60 years on the African diaspora, specifically on Black studies and themes in French and Spanish literature from 1930-1960. Howard University was the first of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to offer graduate training in the Romance languages. It was discovered that until the beginning of the 1960s, Master's theses were considered dissertations, with the first Master's thesis being officially awarded in 1932. It was not until Dr. W. Mercer Cook was appointed professor of French at Howard University in the early 1940s that courses on the Negro in French and French Caribbean literature were introduced. Prior to that, HBCUs concentrated more on the classical curriculum of Latin and Greek language and literature. A 38-item bibliography of Master's theses in this area completed at Howard University is provided. A list of the Master's theses completed on the African diaspora over a 60-year period is included. (NAV)

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Master's Theses on Afro-French and Afro-Hispanic Literatures and Cultures and African American Images in French and Spanish Literatures Produced by Howard University's Department of Romance Languages from 1933-1993

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INTRODUCTION

In November 1993, I received a request from a high school teacher in Haiti who was in search of a 1953 doctoral dissertation entitled "The Martinican Novelists: Clément Richter, Mayotte Capécia, and Joseph Zobel" by Elizabeth Brooks. The year of the dissertation puzzled me because I knew that the Department of Romance Languages did not produce its first doctoral dissertation until 1985. I became quite interested in finding a reference to the work and to respond to the request of the Haitian teacher-scholar. After searching departmental files to no avail, I called upon the aid of a research assistant in Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Collection. The assistant found the document and made a copy of it for me. After examining the "dissertation", I learned that departmental master's theses were called "dissertations" until the beginning of the 1960's.

The search prompted me to make further investigations into the history of graduate education in the department and the research directions of both faculty and graduate students during the early years of the department. Howard was the first of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to offer graduate training in the Romance Languages. In fact, Romance Languages was among the sixteen (16) departments of the College of Arts and Sciences authorized by the Executive Committee to

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offer graduate programs on April 10, 1932. The records show that the first master's degree was awarded in 1933 to George W. Jackson, who received the B.A. in French from Howard in 1932. His thesis was an analysis of the works of the 16th century French poet Joachim du Bellay.

My specific interest was to determine if there were master's theses on "Black" studies and themes in French and Spanish Literatures during the three decades, i.e., 1930 - 1960, following the initiation of graduate programs in the department. My suspicion was that there were few, if any, because such studies were not 'desirable' and 'embraced' even at the HBCUs during those years. It was during the so-called Black Movement of the 1960's that Black Studies would gain widespread attention from Black scholars in the Humanities. However, several African American scholars of French, German, and Spanish literatures and cultures had conducted research and published on "Negro" themes prior to the 1960's. In fact, the first chairman of the Department of Romance Languages, Valaurez B. Spratlin, who is acknowledged as the first African American to be awarded the doctorate in Spanish (Middlebury, 1931), wrote and published his dissertation [1] on Juan Latino, the African slave-writer who lived and published in 16th century Spain. The department, however, did not offer the Master's degree in Spanish during his chairmanship from 1927 to 1961. From the thirties to the early

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[1] Spratlin, V. B., Juan Latino: Slave and Humanist, Spinner Press: New York, 1938.

sixties, all of the theses were on the French-speaking world. This is partially explained by national historical trends. Prior to the sixties, French was considered the "prestige language" and was therefore more commonly taught than Spanish and other modern languages in most of the HBCU's (and at other institutions of higher learning).

It is documented that many of the private HBCUs, founded during the latter part of the 19th century, adopted a classical, literary curriculum, which included the required study of Greek and Latin. Howard University and Morehouse College, for example, offered three years of Latin and two years of Greek when they were founded. At the private Black colleges, modern languages, usually French and/or German, were offered as elective courses at the turn of the 20th century. [2]

The appointment of Dr. W. Mercer Cook as professor of French at Howard in the early 1940's is very significant. He is credited for introducing courses on the Negro in French literature and on French Caribbean Literature. Prior to Cook's appointment, several master's theses which dealt with the image of or portrayal of Blacks in the writings of French writers or statesmen. The following titles provide examples: "Honoré de Balzac's Conception of the Negro" (1933), "Napoleon and the Negro" (1935), Lafayette and the Negro" (1935), "Voltaire and the Negro" (1936), and "Saint-Pierre and the Negro" (1938).

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[2] Logan, Rayford W. Howard University: The First Hundred Year, 1867-1967, New York University Press, 1969.

Dr. Cook, along with his colleagues in Spanish, would encourage many students at Howard to carry out research on the African diaspora.

Below is a list of master's theses completed on the African diaspora over a sixty-year period. All of them are available in the Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Collection, located in Founders Library.

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Ahwai, Rosa. "El problema del color en la novela negra ecuatoriana", 1975.

Augustave, Elsie. "The Influence of the Folktale and Vaudou on the Haitian Indigenist Novel as Seen in L'Héritage Sacré and Gouverneurs de la Rosée, 1984.

Azevedo, Ernestine Henderson. "The Theme of Death in the French-African Novel", 1970.

Bennett, Thomas Lee. "La Pleiade Haitienne", 1975.

Burke, Mary Edna. "Honoré de Balzac's Conception of the Negro", 1933.

Bowden, Marian C. "Saint-Pierre and the Negro", 1938.

Brooks, Elizabeth. "Three Martinican Novelists: Clément Richer, Mayotte Capécia, and Joseph Zobel", 1953.

Byas, Vincent W. "Daniel Thaly: Poet Laureate of Martinique", 1941.

Carter, Arthur Fitzgerald. "The Educational System of Martinique, FWI", 1941.

Carter, Constance Jackson. "The Reverberation of Soul Black Awareness in the United States and French-speaking Black African Countries, 1972.

Cooke, Cynthia. La psicología del mulato en tres novelas cubanas, 1971.

Crockett, Marjorie F. "African Tradition and the Poetry of Léopold Sedar Senghor", 1983.

Davis, Toney J. "Algunos poemas negros de Cuba y Ecuador", 1969.

Filostrat, Christian. "Genese et dynamique de la Negritude aux Antilles française", 1972.

Foster, Alice A., "Lafayette and the Negro", 1935.

Gill, Madeline R. "El Problema económico-social del negro en la obra de Ildefonso Pereda Valdés", 1971.

Haywood, Florence Elie. "Jacques Roumain: Sa pensée et son art", 1972.

Henderson, Carole E. "The Tales of Amadou Koumba by Birago Diop", [Translation from French into English], 1968.

Hillman, Selwyn. "Las fases ideológicas de Nicolás Guillén a través de su poesía", 1972.

Ikegwu, Chinedum E. "Le Leopard et la tortue dans les contes chez Fang, les Mpongwe, les Bapundu du Gabon", 1982.

Jackson, Doris J. "Comparative Oral Traditions in the Works of Bernard B. Dadié and Nicolás Guillén", 1984.

Jenkins, Cecie Roberta. "Voltaire and the Negro", 1936.

Kelly, Charlena H. "Racial Problems in Ecuadorian Contemporary Novels, 1969.

Kendrick, Martha B. "The Negro as Seen By Contemporary French Writers", 1941.

Lewis, Kenneth. "La mujer en la poesía afro-hispánica", 1975.

Malone, Alvan D. "Federic Marcelin and the Haitian Novel", 1969.

Mushingi, Tulinabo. "Le langage africain dans la litterature romanesque africaine d'expression française: Ahmadou Kourouma, Ferdinand Oyono et Ousmane Sembene", 1983.

Osafo-Gyimah, Faustine. "La femme dans la poesie africaine de langue française", 1969.

Parks, Valerie Ethelyn. "Napoleon and the Negro", 1935.

Purchas-Tulloch, Jean. "El folklore afrocubano en la poesía de Nicolás Guillén", 1972.

Racine, Marie M. B. "A Linguistic Study of Southern Haitian Creole: Phonology", 1965.

Robinson, Norma. "Hasta una revalorización de la poesía negra del siglo XX en la America Latina", 1972.

Saint-Preux, Macajou. "Commitment in Literature: A Comparative Study of Sartre's Les Mouches and Senghor's "Chaka", 1983.

Talley, Micheal F. "The Relationship Between American Negroes and Haitians", 1970.

Trabul, Doris Heggan. "Race Relations in the United States as Seen by French Travellers", 1958.

White, John Watson. "The Supernatural in French-African Novels", 1968.

Williams, Phillip T. "Le colonialisme vu dans l'oeuvre d'Ousmane Sembene", 1981.

Williams, Walter B. "La Releve: The Focal Point of Haitian Literature, 1950.